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SUBJECT Changes in the White House Staff

DAN RATHER: In its public talk about economic programs the Reagan Administration's phrase of the year has been "mid-course correction". But there's another kind of mid-course correction insiders talk about privately. It has to do with changes in White House staff and the cabinet when the President starts the second half of his four-year term next year.

Start with the inner circle at the White House and Chief of Staff James Baker. He wants out of his job while he's still ahead. He'd like a cabinet post, badly wanted Al Haig's old job, but was disappointed when George Schultz got it instead. Baker would also like to be Attorney General, but there's no opening there and doesn't look like there's going to be one anytime soon.

Baker probably could have William Casey's job as CIA Chief, but Baker's not so sure that that's a good enough stepping stone for him.

National Security Advisor William Clark would be under heavy pressure to become Chief of Staff if Baker leaves, but Clark, our sources say, doesn't want it, thinks it's a dull, detailed job.

Michael Deaver, probably the most influential man in the Reagan inner circle. Deaver is once again telling skeptical associates that he won't be there next year. He's quoted as saying he has to make some money while Reagan is still President.

Deaver denies it, but some insiders suspect from this that Deaver doesn't expect Reagan to serve a second term.

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Counselor Ed Meese. If Deaver leaves, our sources say, Reagan will want even more to have this old and trusted friend in a room across the hall.

Just outside the inner circle stands Budget Director David Stockman. Discussion focuses not on whether but when he leaves. There is no clear successor.

No likely changes in the top four cabinet posts at State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice. But there are quite a few in the cabinet whose departures are expected sooner rather than later. UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the senior woman. Nobody wants her to leave but it's widely reported she hates the job, doesn't like being Madam No in a posts that bores her.

Energy Secretary James Edwards is already leaving. His Deputy, Kenneth Davis, would be a logical successor, but he's another former Bechtel Corporation employee. The Senate would probably reject him on those grounds alone. That leaves Interior Undersecretary Donald Hudell as a front runner.

Other posts expected to be open sooner rather than later? Terrel Bell's at Education, Ray Donovan's at Labor, if it can be made to look like he's not quitting under fire. A likely successor, Drew Lewis at Transporation, but he carries the heavy baggage of having fired 11,000 air controllers last year. Lewis is on other lists as well, OMB Director, National Party Chairman, or even White House Chief of Staff, if Baker leaves.

That's the talk. The action, the shifting, hiring, and firing is expected shortly after November's elections, and from all indications it may amount to something more than simply a mid-course correction.

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